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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, January 4, 1933

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Food Combinations." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Some people are afraid to sit thirteen at a table. Some people take the longest way home if a black cat runs in front of them. Some people think knocking on wood will prevent misfortunes. And some people believe eating fish and milk at the same meal is dangerous. A lot of us have our little pet superstitions and fears tucked away somewhere, whether we realize it or not.

I know a man who goes lion hunting in Africa for sport and pilots an airplane without the slightest touch of fear. But just let him sit down to a dinner with both lobster and ice cream on the menu and watch him grow pale with fright. Yes, the very thought of lobster or any shellfish and ice cream scares him more than lions and airplane accidents.

You'd be surprised at the number of otherwise sane and sensible people who have food superstitions and hang on to them through life. You'd be surprised at the number of people who really believe that certain combinations of food are poisonous. They think the foods are all right alone, one at a time, but in combination--oh, never. Only the other day I had a letter asking about the fish-and-milk combination. The letter said that natives of Oklahoma never would touch these two at the same meal. Were they really injurious?

"No," answer the nutrition specialists. "This is just another unfounded food fear. No combination of good food is harmful. As for fish and milk, fish croquettes are favorites with many people and they're made with these two foods mixed together."

Where did these food superstitions come from? How did they start and why?

Often people guessed at the reason for a digestive upset without getting at the real cause. Often they put the blame on the combination of foods rather than on some other harmful factor in the meal. Take fish, for example. Fish and shellfish owe most of their bad reputation to a very real tendency to spoil easily. When not perfectly fresh, fish protein certainly can produce severe digestive illness, just as any spoiled protein can. But milk has nothing to do with it.

What about lobster and ice cream? Lobster is a concentrated protein with very little fat. The protein of lobster is just as digestible as any other protein food, provided it is fresh and in good condition. The point is that lobster and ice cream generally spell a party. And a party often means too much food, late hours and weariness--all good causes for sleepless nights, bad dreams, and indigestion. Eating much of a very rich food along with sea food, of course, will overtax the stomach. Often the rich food is ice cream--which may explain the tradition about sea food and ice cream.

The nutritionists say that you can eat two good foods at the same meal safely. The dangers arise from over eating or eating food not absolutely fresh or badly prepared. Eating when you are very tired or upset emotionally may also cause trouble. If you eat moderately, if your meals are well-balanced--neither too much fat nor too much sweet, if your food is well cooked and prepared, and then if you find that your meals don't agree with you, something is wrong. Don't lay the blame on food combinations. Ask yourself whether you have enough rest, sleep, exercise and sunshine and whether your habits are regular.

Another superstition bans eating tomatoes, acid fruits or pickles and milk at the same time, because the acid curdles the milk. Of course it does. But what of it? Milk curdles in the stomach anyway in the normal process of digestion. Curdled milk may not look tempting, but it's perfectly good to eat.

A few unfortunate people really do have a special sensitiveness to certain foods. Some of them really can't eat tomatoes or cucumbers or strawberries without suffering a distinct reaction. But these people are the exceptions. Generally the poor misguided souls who are afraid of bananas, berries, cocoa, cucumbers, eggs, fish, lobster, meat, mushrooms, onions, tomatoes, radishes, raw apples, acid fruits and what not are just victims of prejudice and superstitions.

In these days of economy when balanced meals and balanced budgets must go together, we can't afford whims and fancies about food. They're too expensive. And they may cut you off from food you need for good health. The more varied your diet, the more likely it is to be well-balanced, to give you the many different kinds of food substances you need. Any and all our foods, if they are in good condition, ought to agree with our digestions, no matter how we combine them. If you limit your diet, you are in danger of not getting the different kinds of nourishment that you need and of suffering from those ills that come from food lacks. So before you say, "Oh, I never touch this," or "I really couldn't eat that", be sure you're not going astray by just another superstition.

We have just time now to plan our dinner for tonight, featuring ham with sweet potatoes and savory sauerkraut--a very delicious combination. Here's the menu: Baked or fried ham slice; Fried sweet potatoes; Savory sauerkraut; Canned or fresh fruit; Thin slices of Christmas fruit cake or cookies to go with it.

Here's a short and easy recipe for savory sauerkraut:

1/4 cup of butter or other fat
1 quart of sauerkraut, and
1/4 teaspoon of celery or caraway seed

Just three ingredients. (Repeat.)

Heat the fat in a skillet until golden brown, and add the sauerkraut and the seasoning. Mix well with a fork to separate the kraut. Cover and cook for five minutes. Serve hot.

Tomorrow: "More Facts to Help You Read the Label."

